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ABSTRACT

Pennsylvania school reform in the decade following the publication of "A Nation at Risk" can be divided into three distinct phases. As these phases parallel those of the nation, Pennsylvania is a representative state in which to explore the nation's efforts to repair its ailing school system. The first phase was that of adding inputs, of assuming that more is better, and changing curricula to provide for more mathematics and science courses. New curricula and new regulations did not actually introduce anything that made students and teachers more accountable or more productive. The second wave was that of restructuring, with teacher empowerment. Restructuring proved to be form without content, a process reform that left the substance of education essentially unchanged. The most recent phase, that of outcomes-based education (OBE), asks for the evaluation of what students can do. While nearly everyone has been willing to agree that concentrating on results makes sense, there are disagreements about how OBE should look in practice and how to measure the outcomes. These arguments resulted in a lack of support for the outcomes approach. The good news for American education, as the quoted remarks of a retiring Pennsylvania school superintendent, Michael Farrell, indicate, is that the state and the nation are aware of the need for change and are exploring ways to improve education. (SLD)

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for Public Policy Alternatives

A NATION AT RISK TEN YEARS LATER:
SCHOOL REFORM IN PENNSYLVANIA FROM 1983 TO THE PRESENT — WHAT'S NEXT?

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INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania school reform in the decade following *A Nation At Risk* can be divided into three distinct phases. As these phases correspond very closely to nationwide trends, Pennsylvania is thus a very representative state in which to explore America's crusade to repair its ailing education system.

Large and highly diverse in its composition, the Keystone State as a reform entity would be neither at the top or the bottom of the class. On the one hand, it witnessed nothing so dramatic as the Texas reform effort led by Ross Perot--or the root and branch structural change occurring in Kentucky under Tom Boysen, but neither was it one of those quieter precincts where change and conflict were muted and routinized.

The Pennsylvania story is a rich mixture of politics and personalities, principle and expedience, and all those other social variables that form the backdrop to education reform at every level.

Economic factors would be profoundly important. The decade in question began and ended in a recession, while the middle period was one of the sunniest economic eras our nation has known. While finance was not the starting point for thinking on school reform, nonetheless by decade's end, it had become the dominant issue that was driving all else before it.

Second only to economics as an issue was governance. At decade's end, the fatigue, frustration, and sense of stalemate felt by education reformers were closely connected to the failure of the state's tangled educational jurisdictions to initiate or sustain coherent reform policy. This institutional gridlock was nowhere better illustrated than by the outcomes morass. Here, Executive Branch, Legislature, State Board, Education Department, Independent Regulatory Commission, and various education and business organizations all became stuck in a glue pot of overlapping jurisdictions and interests in a process that few understood and none could control.

PHASE I (1983-1987): "INPUTS OR MORE IS BETTER"

In the Spring of 1983, Richard Thornburgh was widely held to be one of the most successful politicians in Pennsylvania history. The previous November he had won a second term as Governor despite a recession that many chose to blame on his Republican Party.

Like President Ronald Reagan who had off-handedly commissioned it and every other governor, Thornburgh was greatly surprised when the *A Nation At Risk* report seemed to loose a tornado of interest in education reform.

The hyperbolic language of the report ("rising tide of mediocrity," "act of war," etc.) and its timing seemed to strike a raw nerve in the American public. Continued economic sluggishness, the drumbeat of foreign competition, media focus on ineffective but costly schools, and a long-simmering public unease over schools all contributed to bringing the education issue to the highly combustible stage that the landmark report ignited.

Retrospectively, one of the most striking things about this reform era is that from beginning to end it was in the hands of politicians, not educators.

In the past, reform had generally been run by educators. There were limited exceptions such as those reforms in the aftermath of Sputnik and at the height of the Great Society, but usually education was not viewed as a sufficiently high priority to command high-level political address.

Why was it different after 1983? The main reason seemed to be that people worried about their country came to see its future as dependent on the economy and the economy as dependent on education. Therefore, effective schools went right to the top of the national agenda.

Three successive Presidents during this era endorsed with growing urgency the notion that the schools were in deep trouble and that their rescue was indispensable to the restoration of America's competitive dominance.

In our federal system, however, it would not be Presidents who would be chief craftsmen of reform but rather Governors and legislators.

Educators would not be wholly left out of the reform process. Those who wrote books--Adler, Boyer, Finn, Goodlad, Ravitch, and Sizer, among others--would serve as major idea banks though most of them were much better at describing the problem than prescribing the solution.

In the states, the education organizations representing school boards, administrators, and particularly teacher unions would be major players in the reform process but nowhere would they find themselves in the driver's seat. That role was always held by the political leaders and their minions on State Boards, and in Departments of Education.

It should also be noted that, after a slow start, the business community, through its various organs, would be a major reform participant in states like Pennsylvania.

In the wake of *A Nation At Risk*, there followed a torrent of books, task force reports, commission studies and the like. Across the land the cry was to do something about our schools--now.

As Dick Thornburgh pondered the question of what to do, he was pleasantly surprised to find the Democrats more than willing to help. This bipartisan tendency was not unique to Pennsylvania. Across the nation, school improvement had an almost patriotic halo, and it was widely viewed to be of such compelling importance that it should not be a partisan issue. As the years went by, this bipartisan euphoria waned but, in the first blush of reform, it was an important factor in the speed with which events moved.

As the political leaders looked for useful things to do, it was significant that they thought in terms of legislation and by extension regulation.

This impulse could hardly be viewed as surprising because after all passing laws is what elected officials do. The situation is worth dwelling upon because it would have much to do with the failure of reform in the first phase or "wave" as some called it.

The political impulse is to do something quickly, pass a law, start a program, and complete it in time to claim some credit during the next campaign season which seemed never more than a

year away.

The difficulty was that this approach does not work well with problems that are broad based, deeply rooted, and systemic in nature as is the case with education or, to name another, health care.

These kinds of problems require an understanding, a patience, and a complexity of address that is generally foreign to the normal legislative process.

In looking back on this first phase of reform, it is remarkable how quickly a consensus developed in regard to fixing the schools. The consensus derived directly from *A Nation At Risk*. In a phrase, it said, "More is Better."

Students needed to take more courses--particularly math and science, do more homework, be more disciplined, study more foreign languages, and take more tests to prove that all of the above was happening.

Schools needed more technology, more teachers making more money (particularly the better ones), more clarity of mission, and above all, more accountability for getting the job done right.

Educational regeneration based on the theme of "More" had broad appeal. Republicans liked the martial tones of national revival; Democrats warmed to the summons to government activism; business resonated with the stress on math, science, technology, and response to foreign competition; and the education establishment grasped immediately that the whole thing added up to major money coming their way.

Legislative action on education hummed into high gear. The 1983-84 sessions were the prelude to national and state elections and politicians were determined to show the public concrete action on this suddenly popular national imperative.

A critical element was the fact that the recession was now over and a surging economy was producing the kind of revenues that would be needed to fund major education initiatives.

Playing off the rhetoric of *A Nation At Risk*, the Thornburgh administration dubbed its education crusade as "Turning the Tide."

The centerpiece of this effort would be major changes in the state curriculum regulations aimed at increased graduation requirements in general and at more math and science in particular.

Because opinion in Pennsylvania reflected the national consensus on what needed to be done, the required action by legislative and executive branches and their regulatory adjuncts moved with relative speed.

These new curriculum standards represented the final triumph of inputs, a "Last Hurrah" of the more-regulation-is-better approach to school reform. Not surprisingly, the crowning piece of this new improved learning machine was a test that would validate the inputs and show who was following the new regulations best. Called TELLS (Test of Essential Learning and Literacy

Skills), this item would check up on all 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders to be sure they were on their way to world class educational attainment.

As in the other 49 states, this rush to educational judgment was unstoppable. Those who posed questions or suggested difficulties were dismissed as carping critics or somehow not team players. It just seemed certain that by raising the bar of this scholastic high jump we were about to see an educational "Great Leap Forward."

With the legislative/regulatory framework in place by 1984, the next three years would witness a gradual process of implementation during which all of the state's 501 school districts would have to integrate the new standards into their own policies and practices.

This as always they dutifully did ("Theirs was not to reason why..."). New math and science courses had to be invented to accommodate the extra year to be taken by all students; pupil schedules had to be tightened up to reflect increased credit requirements; and of course, more staff had to be hired.

All across the Commonwealth, committees of teachers and administrators labored through a million meeting hours working diligently to make the new standards fit with the old realities.

In this task, they in fact succeeded so well that the old realities were hardly inconvenienced at all. This, in fact, was the main problem. As the famous French adage put it, "All was changed, yet all remained the same."

How did this happen? What went wrong? What went wrong was that the reforms were essentially bureaucratic and not educational in nature. Therefore, other than an alteration of the paper trail, nothing happened. No human behaviors were changed.

Responding to political direction, the State Board of Education altered its regulations. Accordingly, the Department of Education altered its procedures and directives.

Responding to said direction, altered regulations, procedures and directives, 501 school districts altered their policies, procedures, and directives. In sum, the local paper trail was adjusted to fit the state paper trial, and then business as usual resumed.

In effect, existing variables of time, space and work were rearranged but not expanded in any significant way. The school day remained six and one-half hours, the school year 180 days, and all that occurred therein remained the same, too.

The new regulations did not cause increased homework for students, or greater exertion for teachers; they did nothing about grade inflation, or social promotion; and they introduced nothing that would make anyone--students, teachers, administrators, board members, or parents--more productive or more accountable.

Severe critics might liken this exercise to the proverbial rearrangement of deck chairs on the *Titanic*, but it would be wrong to think that nothing changed. The internal shifting of variables did have certain consequences. There were some winners and losers.

Vocational education was a loser because students were compelled to spend a greater portion of their fixed amount of school time pursuing academic subjects in their home schools. Therefore, the under-enrollment of area vocational schools (AVTS) which had been merely bad, now became disastrous.

The increased student time in academic courses might have been useful except that the quality of such courses declined in proportion to their increase in quantity. Instead of academic content and rigor going up, it went down as schools adjusted to the changes simply by stretching out the seat time and credit hours of existing content areas.

More courses, for instance, had the words "math and science" attached to them so that the lower-ability students could get the newly mandated additional credits simply by sitting still for more time on the same tasks.

Needless to say, no one was going to admit publicly that this was happening because to do so would be upsetting to all those parties who wanted to believe that the changes were useful. Also, such admission might well invite negative responses from politicians and bureaucrats who would be quick to blame you rather than themselves if anything were seen to be amiss.

All of this reality avoidance was greatly facilitated by the fact that neither before or after the changes was there any kind of testing system that measured student achievement with any reliability at all. The scandalous state of American standardized testing as exposed by Thomas Toch (*In the Name of Excellence*, 1991) and others provided the perfect vehicle to accommodate this flight from reality. No matter what the schools were doing, there was a test publisher who could guarantee that they would remain eternally "above the national average."

As the Thornburgh administration drew to a close in the winter of 1986-87, it was increasingly evident to thoughtful school people that the campaign for "Turning the Tide" had not done so.

For the above-noted reasons, however, it was in nobody's interest to make an announcement to this effect. Only years later with the advent of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) would the state tacitly admit the complete failure of its earlier effort.

Instead, the education world followed its usual instinct to nimbly dance away from its failures while loudly proclaiming the virtues of the latest astonishing "breakthrough" (i.e., fad).

PHASE II (1987-1991): RESTRUCTURING OR THE TRIUMPH OF PROCESS

The inauguration of Democrat Robert P. Casey in January of 1987 meant not just a new governor but a new party inhabiting the executive branch of government.

Opinion sampling done for Casey by pollster Patrick Caddell revealed that education as an issue retained a powerful hold on the minds of Pennsylvanians. As the new governor put together his administration, he talked with experts across the country and searched for ideas in education that could be translated into initiatives that would bear his distinctive stamp.

Just as Dick Thornburgh had embraced *A Nation At Risk* as the policy underpinning of his

education endeavors, so too would Bob Casey find inspiration in a powerful landmark education report released right around the time of his election.

The Carnegie Report on Teaching--*A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century*--would have in this decade of reform an impact second only to *A Nation At Risk*.

This study was endorsed by the nation's major teachers' unions--The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers--and adopted by the National Governors Conference as its "centerpiece of educational reform." Further, the report had the added impetus of the Carnegie Foundation and its commitment to spend up to $50 million over a decade to promote acceptance of its recommendations.

From the beginning, it was clear that the educational ideas of the Casey administration had their principal origin in the Carnegie Report. Thus, like Thornburgh before him, Casey would tie his educational fortunes to the hoped-for success of a national report's basic idea.

Carnegie marked a basic and lateral shift away from the "input" orientation of *A Nation At Risk*. Simply stated, Carnegie asserted that whatever was wrong with American education could be fixed only by fixing whatever was wrong with the teaching profession. The report further asserted that what was wrong with the teaching profession--aside from inadequate financial rewards, of course--was that it lacked real decision-making power within the schools.

The remedy for this problem was teacher "empowerment" or as it referred to schools, "site-based management." The way to accomplish this remedy became known under the all encompassing generic term, "Restructuring."

What American schools needed according to Carnegie was to be completely restructured so that empowered teachers could engage in site-based management. If this was done, then all those things constraining student achievement and school productivity would somehow disappear.

Beyond question, the Carnegie analysis was a powerful one and there was great truth in its insights about schools and teaching. Its flaw, like most of the major reports, was not in its astute description of problems, but rather in the shakiness of its prescribed solutions.

To begin with, Carnegie's implied motto of "All Power to Teachers" was very off-putting to other education stakeholders such as school boards, central administration, principals, and parents. These flaws, however, would not become "perfectly clear" until much later. In the spring of 1987, the "Carnegie impulse" was at its zenith and it would be the educational lodestar by which Bob Casey would set his compass throughout his first term.

To lead his Education Department, Casey chose Thomas Gilhool, an attorney best known in school circles as the special education advocate who filed the landmark *PARC* case in 1972. As had been the case when Democratic Governor Milton Shapp chose Attorney John Pittenger as Chief State School Officer, the selection of Gilhool was a non-traditional move which would be the spark to no small amount of controversy.

Usually, the top education post went to a superintendent or other stalwart of the education

establishment, thus insulating the Governor from serious conflict with said groups. Imbued with the restructuring zeal of the Carnegie Report, Casey at the outset, however, was not averse to some jousting with the established order.

It is valuable to pause a moment to look at the Education Department (PDE) that Gilhool inherited from Thornburgh's departing Secretary, Margaret Smith.

In terms of its structure and statutory authority, the Department had to be ranked as one of the most powerful in the nation. At its peak, it had more than 1,600 employees. Though not large by New York standards (more than 4,000 employees), PDE had great leverage in local school districts.

Under Thornburgh, however, the Department had become a prime target for the budgetary axe. By 1987, a long-running hiring freeze had reduced the staff to just a little over 600 employees.

Those who operated the Department never could accept this decline as permanent, and so rather than reorganize in light of new realities, they constantly redistributed the responsibilities of departed employees to those who remained. As one wag put it, "We've got more people acting here than a dramatic academy."

The institutional disinclination of the Department to change itself was greatly symbolic of the general unwillingness of the entire education establishment to adapt to change. As one educator put it to Secretary Gilhool, "You've little chance to restructure Pennsylvania education if you can't even restructure 333 Market Street (PDE)."

As state bureaucracies go, PDE through most of its recent history had a good reputation for responsiveness and integrity. As the attrition-induced decline set in, however, competence levels began to suffer. The best staffers became overworked and under-recognized. A steady exodus began. Low salaries made finding capable replacements very difficult, if not impossible.

Only redesign of the sweeping Kentucky or Virginia type could re-establish effectiveness and good morale. Sadly, for the many fine people who worked in the Department--and the districts dependent upon them--this never happened.

It did not take the new Secretary long to clash with the educational establishment. The subject was testing and the ensuing crossfire illuminated one of the great dilemmas of American school reform.

Thornburgh was gone but his TELLS test lived on and, in 1987, Gilhool released the district-by-district results in rank order from highest to lowest along with a press statement that clearly implied that the scores were somehow indicative of the relative quality or effectiveness of individual school districts.

Gilhool's major error was in basing his rankings on an instrument of measurement that was clearly inadequate for such a purpose. Obscured by this error, however, was the fact that he also violated one of the great unwritten commandments of public education: "Thou Shalt Not Compare."

Compounding the indignation of education officials over this "unfair" comparison was the fact that the media and much of the public thought that ranking was a dandy idea. Like William Bennett's much reviled (among educators) "Wall Chart," Gilhool's rankings played well with a press and public that liked to see an educational equivalent of "League Standings" and didn't care much about finer points like "psychometric validity."

Improperly or not, Gilhool had held the education establishment's feet to the fire, and for this they would never forgive him.

Aside from its strong support by unions--always a plus in a Democratic administration--a major appeal of Carnegie's teacher "empowerment" doctrine was that it might prove an antidote to Pennsylvania education's perennial status as the most strike-ridden state in the nation.

Ironically, the most renowned educator in the Casey Administration was not in the Education Department, but rather the head of the Department of Labor and Industry, Harris Wofford.

Wofford joined Gilhool in a cross-departmental effort to create what was called the Schools Cooperation Program. This program was essentially an effort to promote harmony among labor and management elements in school districts. The state recognized key districts that were models in this regard and sought to encourage others to follow this path through a series of conferences and extensive literature.

A premier example of this program was the Easton Area School District* where on May 9, 1988, Gilhool, joined by the heads of the four major education organizations--School Boards, Superintendents, Principals and Teachers--went to recognize a remarkable series of Carnegie-based agreements ratified that day.

The teacher and principal units ratified labor pacts and the Board adopted policies with significant features of "empowerment" including a Master Teacher Panel, Peer Assistance Program, and a degree of Site-Based Management.

While a prime exemplar of Carnegie's central idea adapted to include Board and Principals, Easton was also a prime example of the limitations of that idea. While "Shared Governance" did transform a district of frequent strikes and cascading grievances into an enduring model of "labor peace" (three successive teacher contracts and not a single teacher grievance in nine years), the price of that peace was a tacit agreement not to promote any change that was unacceptable to any of the parties. This meant that while modest improvements could be advanced, essentially the status quo remained unchanged--hardly a recipe for educational transformation.

The lesson of Schools Cooperation and Casey's other Carnegie-type initiatives--the establishment of nine Lead Teacher Centers and the Re-Learn Program (a borrowing from Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools)--was that you could do some useful things to improve the working atmosphere of schools and you could do some marginal tinkering with program but that none of the above was going to significantly alter the basic reality of schools. In a phrase, the structures of public education proved impervious to "restructuring."

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* The author served as Superintendent in Easton after 1984.

In the end, restructuring proved to be form without content, a "process" reform that left substance essentially untouched. In the end, like Thornburgh's "reform" of curriculum regulations, Casey's restructuring touched only the surfaces of education while leaving the core variables of time, work, and accountability unchanged. Yet another attempt to raise student achievement and school productivity had failed.

This failure should not obscure the fact that an energetic and sincere effort had been made or that the frustration experienced in Pennsylvania was part of a national pattern of state-based efforts that consistently fell short of the mark.

In fact, the energy of Gilhool's promotion of Carnegie's ideas was not without political cost to Governor Casey. Across the state, both Gilhool and the Carnegie Report were widely viewed as excessively pro-teacher.

The friendship of the politically powerful state teachers union (PSEA) proved a mixed blessing for Secretary Gilhool. In the end, it was not enough to offset the steady drumbeat of criticism from other education organizations.

Rather than hurt the re-election campaign of his long-time friend and mentor, Bob Casey, Tom Gilhool tendered his resignation as Secretary in the summer of 1989.

The new Secretary of Education, Donald Carroll--most recently Superintendent in Harrisburg--was a genial ex-Marine, politically adroit, and a long-time education insider. Warmly received by the education establishment, Carroll with skill and loyalty would provide continuity to Casey's program and also mend his political fences during the run up to the election campaign.

Part one of Bob Casey's effort at education reform was over. Part two would begin only after his triumphant re-election and would occur in a very different environment.

PHASE III (1991-PRESENT): OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

The first two phases of this Pennsylvania school reform era--"inputs" and "restructuring"--had corresponded closely to the national reform style. Inputs was now thoroughly discredited and restructuring was moving into eclipse as well; both had failed to meet expectations and the seminal reports that launched them were now little spoken of. The doctrine of "empowerment" lingered on but its main national exemplars--Rochester and Chicago--had slipped into disarray and bickering over finance. Schools and the children in them remained essentially unchanged.

The reform impulse both nationally and in Pennsylvania became fragmented. There were no more landmark reports and no discernible major trend that could be acclaimed as reform's "Third Wave." Many people who had enthusiastically endorsed earlier failed nostrums were now skeptical and more inclined to quietly go their own way.

This change, however, did not mean that education had dropped out of the news or ceased to be an object of widespread concern. When George Bush and the nation's governors had gathered for an "education summit," there was no lack of fanfare.

The six national goals that emerged as the cornerstone of the President's "America 2000" program were widely discussed but curiously seemed to have little cumulative impact. They were widely thought to be either too vague ("all children ready to learn") or too unrealistic ("first in the world in math and science").

Nonetheless, emulating most other states, the Commonwealth dutifully launched "Pennsylvania 2000" to correspond with the national effort. Many communities and school districts within the state followed suit at their level as well.

The major reason for this general distraction and lack of direction in school reform was money--or more pointedly the lack thereof. The continuing recession of the early nineties had pushed state governments into a horrendous financial mire that was distorting every priority, but none more than education.

Compounding the state's recession woes was the fact that a deficit-obsessed Federal government was off-loading its own financial responsibilities onto the states almost every time Congress passed a law. None of these unfunded mandates was more devastating than Medicaid which, with spiralling health costs and court-expanded eligibility, became a battering ram aimed at every other account in the state budget.

Not surprisingly, a major consequence of this Federal irresponsibility was that the states themselves began off-loading whatever financial burdens they could onto local authorities including school districts.

All of these lamentable trend lines came together in the budget of 1991. Until this time, education had enjoyed a relatively favored status among the major budget categories. Educators who had come to take this status for granted were now in for a rude awakening.

Between 1983 and 1991, Pennsylvania had paralleled a national trend which saw real education expenditure (adjusted for inflation) rise 31 percent. In the eyes of legislators seeking to distribute pieces of a shrinking economic pie among a myriad of expanding entitlements and priorities, these ever-rising education costs seemed increasingly hard to justify. In their view, the schools didn't seem to be getting any better despite all this new money, and the demands for even more money seemed never to end.

Attitudes towards education and educators began to change. Seen through the eyes of legislators (and the executive) educators seemed ungrateful for the increases they had received and unrealistic about what they could hope for in the future. They seemed oblivious to such things as the juggernaut of Medicaid or the fact that building prisons was more popular with a populace increasingly worried about crime.

The budget of 1991 marked a decisive turning point in Pennsylvania education finance. Having deferred many hard decisions until after the election, Casey in 1991 called for the largest tax increase in state history. Given prevailing economic conditions, this was necessary just for the state to keep its head financially above water. At the same time, it was also necessary to unload discretionary spending wherever possible. Regarding education, the chosen vehicle for this divestiture was special education. 1991 began a three-year process of inexorably moving this

high cost center off the state's expenditure page and onto that of local districts.

The budget of 1991 would also be a turning point in local school districts as many chickens came home to roost.

Economic pressures rippled across the state and affected all levels of government. State share of total educational expenditure had been steadily dropping (from 44 percent in 1983 to a projected 34 percent for 1993), but this decline had been offset by strong local revenues in a pre-recession economy. Now those local revenues were waning at the same time the state was escalating its own cost-dumping campaign.

Rising pressures on local property taxpayers were exacerbated in many places by long-deferred county-wide reassessments. These politically explosive exercises only fanned taxpayer anger at a time when increasing proportions of the population were hurting economically.

A final piece in this mosaic of unrest was provided by growing resentment over what were widely viewed as exorbitant teacher contracts. Benefitting in this reform era from the general desire for better schools, teachers had done well economically. When times were good, this trend drew little ire, but when the economy began "downsizing" most other industries, more and more distressed citizens began to wonder why education should be the exception.

The financial vise would also lead, as it had in many other states, to a lawsuit challenging the wide disparity in per pupil expenditure in districts across the state. Brought by the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) and eventually having 176 districts as plaintiffs, this suit would build a steady pressure on the Governor and the Legislature to address extreme funding inequities. At the outset, many in the education establishment saw the courts as a useful device for leveraging total dollars upward despite taxpayer resistance. As suits in other states demonstrated (notably Texas), the more likely effect was a highly divisive "Robin Hood" effect that threatened to weaken allegiance to public schools.

The financial crisis was also putting a brutal squeeze upon the private schools which educated nearly one-sixth of Pennsylvania's children. The Catholic parochial school system, in particular, suffered because their cost margins were so thin to begin with. These pressures became a major motivation for the Catholic Conference to go all out in support of a voucher plan.

Vouchers and other variations of educational choice had been percolating all across the nation for some years. In addition to finance, this movement was being driven by appalling educational conditions in many big city systems. Most polling showed growing support for choice, particularly among minority parents.

Choice bills of one kind or another were to be found in most states and in Pennsylvania the issue burst into public prominence when the State Senate in December 1991 passed a bill to grant vouchers worth $900 per pupil to parents who wished to choose an educational alternative other than their own public school.

The Senate vote galvanized the education establishment to mount a massive campaign to defeat the bill (HB 1133) in the House and pro-voucher forces responded in kind. There followed a

distortion-filled media campaign that did credit to neither side.

By successfully painting the voucher bill as requiring a huge tax increase, the anti-choice forces narrowly succeeded in preventing its passage. The issue did not go away, however, and Pennsylvania remained among the states providing the most fertile ground for voucher initiatives.

Ever since the decline of the restructuring impulse, the Casey Administration had been casting about for a new vehicle to promote education reform. Ultimately, it selected Outcomes Based Education, a theoretical descendant of the old mastery learning idea that had gained new currency in recent educational literature.

OBE rested upon the highly laudable concept that results (outcomes) were a better measure of educational progress than inputs.

In embracing OBE, state authorities had now come full circle from the positions they had taken immediately following *A Nation At Risk*. Then inputs--the more the better--had been triumphant. Now the state was returning to those very same curriculum regulations and with great passion declaring them a complete failure. All of the traditional input measures--clock hours, seat time, credit, certification, prescribed courses, etc.--were now held up to public scorn as meaningless. A new rubric swept across education land: "Inputs are out, and outcomes are in."

Launching the OBE campaign in his 1992 State of the State Address, the Governor somewhat oversimplified the concept in words that would came back to haunt him: "Exactly what we expect our students to know and do will be crystal clear for the first time."

Alas, for the Governor and the state, things would not be quite that simple. While everyone could applaud the notion of concentrating on results, nobody knew what OBE would look like in practice.

Essentially, there were two ways the state could go in implementing the outcomes concept. The first way would very much resemble the approach adopted by other industrial nations who also focused on results. That path led directly to a "high stakes" test, usually by way of a national curriculum. Since both high stakes testing and national (and even state) curriculums were traditionally abhorrent to the education establishment, this route was never seriously considered.

The second option was to list and partially define the desired outcomes and then tell 501 school districts to go figure how they wanted to achieve them--sort of a study guide with no test attached. This vague and "non-coercive" approach very much resembled the current status quo and hopefully would not offend too many people.

Option two carried the day with apparently little debate, and the Department of Education was handed the task of carrying it out. The work product of this effort, however, turned out disastrously in a set of no fewer than 575 specific but hopelessly vague outcomes, each one more fatuous than the one before. Examples: "All students develop an understanding of their personal characteristics (e.g., interests, needs, attitudes, and temperament)," or "All students understand and appreciate their worth as unique and capable individuals, and exhibit self-esteem." Even the State Board of Education's assessment acknowledged that these "outcomes" as written into

regulations, included "too much jargon," were "not clear enough, not subject to assessment, too redundant," and involved "too much process and too little content knowledge."

Even though the outcomes were withdrawn, rewritten, and boiled down from 575 to 57 separate--but still vague--items, the damage to their credibility seemed irreversible. To many thoughtful people, the idea of outcomes without tests made about as much sense as playing tennis without a net.

The final doom of the outcomes was probably sealed by an unanticipated but furious controversy over references in the outcomes to "values." At last, the outcomes gained the attention of the public, but not at all in the manner that their authors might wish. Across the state a firestorm of grassroots criticism enveloped the outcomes. Though frequently based on misinterpretation of the outcomes, the wave of criticism proved immune to all efforts at damage control and soon overwhelmed the legislature and even the governor himself.

By early 1993, Governor Casey had found himself in the unusual position of asking the State Board of Education to delay, delete, or rewrite key portions of the outcomes that his own administration had submitted. More unusual was the fact that they refused and passed the outcomes over his objections.

Passage of the outcomes by the State Board was already quixotic in nature since it was evident that the legislature was primed to at least rewrite if not completely overturn them. The outcomes--once heralded as a "nationwide precedent"--had now become a "statewide disaster."

Though the Governor in the spring would make yet another effort to retrieve the situation through cosmetic changes he described as a "compromise," it was clear that the outcomes were a spent force with the unmistakable label, "damaged goods." Even if they survived in some truncated form, the likelihood of overcoming widespread skepticism and imposing them on a wary public seemed a remote possibility for a badly bruised lame duck administration.

CONCLUSION: A SUPERINTENDENT'S SAGA

Mike Farrell was beginning to perspire as the television lights steadily raised the temperature in the Capitol's ornate Executive Conference Room. Hemmed in by a throng of reporters, state workers and invited educators, he strained to hear the voice of Governor Robert Casey: ". . . Exactly what we expect our students to know and do will be crystal clear for the first time." (March 31, 1993)

As soon as the Governor concluded his remarks, a reporter quickly turned to Mike saying, "Dr. Farrell, you've been a Superintendent ever since the ***Nation At Risk*** *report came out. Do you think things have gotten any better for Pennsylvania school children? Will the Governor's outcomes-based education make a difference?"*

"Young lady," he replied, "I'll be retiring in a few months, so I'd like to believe that what we've been doing these last ten years has meant something. As for the outcomes, it'll be a good while before we know if they've put our kids on the road to success, or whether they're just another dead-end street. Believe me, these answers will be clearer to tomorrow's historians than to today's reporters or educators. . . ."

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Some months later, Mike Farrell sat at a head table barely touching his food and reflected on how many retirement dinners he had attended both as a teacher and administrator. Now it was his turn to be an "honoree." With affection, he recalled his father who long ago told him that retirement was like adolescence--you only do it once in life and nothing that goes before prepares you for it.

*It was nearly time for him to speak. Still in his reverie, he half heard the emcee giving an overly long introduction. "Dr. Michael Farrell, our honoree as the county's Penn State Alumni of the Year...43 years in education...former President of the State Superintendents Association. Tonight Dr. Farrell will speak to us on "**A Nation At Risk**--Ten Years After: Where We Go From Here."*

Mike looked out at the relaxed and expectant gathering, adjusted his notes on the dais and began:

"My friends, if I really knew where we go from here, why would I be retiring?" As the laughter subsided, he continued, "Most of you are not educators so I'll try to tell you what I think without a lot of that gobbledygook we educators are notorious for. My friends always told me I was a much better communicator as a football coach than I ever was as a Superintendent. I'm going to tell you where I think we are but I'm going to do it in kind of a different way. I'm going to tell you what I remember of the way we were, and then what I think has happened since.

"Just before I began that wonderful forty-three years, I served a couple of years as a young soldier in what was then called, 'Occupied Germany.' The Berlin Blockade was still going on when I arrived and, let me tell you that that country and those people--even three years after the war's end--were in mighty rough shape. It wasn't just the Germans, though. I had a chance to do a little travelling and that whole continent was filled with uncleared rubble. Unless you were there, you can't imagine what it was like to be an American soldier in those days. We were like some kind of new Roman centurions sent from afar by a great empire then enjoying an Augustan Age. If a thing had a motor in it, it must have been built in Detroit. More steel came out of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, than from Germany, France, and Britain combined. Made in USA was the standard for the world. We GIs used to naively joke that there were only two kinds of people in the world, Americans and those who wanted to become Americans.

"When you looked at the Europeans, you felt sorry for them. Our school books told us how they had a glorious past, but it seemed now like they had no future. Well, let me tell you we were sure wrong on that score. Those people picked themselves up out of the dust, worked hard, and built themselves a future.

"In the early Eighties, my son Tom was over there as a young Army officer, and let me tell you, his experience was different from mine. My wife and I have also gone over on vacation though not in recent years because the prices are too high.

"Now, you're wondering what this has to do with education. Well, let me tell you what I think.

"For at least 25 years after 1945, we went through a very abnormal historical period, a time when America had no real competition. World War II was bad for everyone else's economy, but good for ours. In 1945, all our competitors--allied and enemies alike--were down and out.

"It took them a long time to get to a point where they could compete. Still, if you looked, you could see it coming. First, they copied everything we had to offer, particularly our democracy and our education system.

"Everybody's hearing about Edward Deming and Total Quality Management today, but how many of us noticed him when he was teaching it to the Japanese 45 years ago?

"One writer called this the 'Age of American Exceptionalism' meaning that we were the exception to every rule. Well, now we're not. We're in the pack with everyone else--still the big guy in volume, but now having to fight for market share with everyone else.

"We used to know how to compete, but then we forgot, because for a generation and more we didn't have to.

"During this period of exceptionalism, we developed some bad habits. We began to think that every progression was a permanent trendline pointing upward. Every year meant bigger salaries, more sales, longer vacations, and shorter work weeks.

"Education wasn't the first American industry to be touched by this American Exceptionalism, but it looks like we'll be last to recover. We still haven't got the message that the party is over. We still basically think that people should keep giving us money whether we produce or not.

"We're a monopoly industry, yet we don't think of ourselves that way. Our plans for reform resemble the 'Five-Year Plans' of Soviet bureaucrats, but we don't see that.

"O.K., now here's the good news.

"The alarm bell has gone off at last. Most of us are waking up. Anyone who's attended school budget hearings in recent years, watched the turnover of school boards, seen the 'Mellow' exodus of superintendents like me, or paid attention to state budget trendlines knows that a new day is dawning.

"The structures of school finance are crumbling at the state and local level. Either we redesign them or watch them collapse. Already it is clear that redesign is the choice.

"So, what's the new dawn going to look like? What are the schools of tomorrow going to be like?

*"In the ten years since **A Nation At Risk**, we've been on a long march from inputs through process to outcomes and somehow we didn't get where we wanted to be. Teachers didn't teach differently, managers didn't manage any better, and kids didn't work any harder despite everyone saying that all these things needed to happen.*

The outcomes had potential. It rested on a great idea. Everyone in the world knows that results are the bottom line. But we walked through the wrong door when it came to implementing it. Our thinking was still back in American Exceptionalism. We thought that, unlike all other countries, we could have results without tests or agreed-upon curriculum.

"However, I think we learned a lesson. I think we're getting on the right track. I think you're going to see those high stakes tests--and they'll be more fair than the ones we have now. You're going to see a national curriculum--though maybe with state and regional variations like the Germans use.

"And here's the best part. When we start giving those tests, our kids and our teachers are going to astound the world.

"We do badly on these international comparisons because over here those tests don't mean anything.

Our tests don't get you promoted, don't get you a diploma, don't get you into college, and don't get you a job. In the rest of the world, tests do all of those things and, believe me, people pay attention when something is on the line.

"In my rather ordinary school district, I've never seen a test that teachers couldn't prepare kids for it if they knew it was important. I never saw a test that kids wouldn't work hard for if they knew it was important.

"Flexibility really hasn't helped us. Being able to do anything has just meant that we get blamed for everything.

"People resist accountability when they don't understand what is wanted. If expectations--a curriculum, a test--are defined clearly, then people can accept accountability.

"We'll have to deregulate our schools just as much as we can because the price of regulation has become exorbitant and wholly counterproductive. Deregulation per se or through devices like Charter Schools is the best way to defeat vouchers if that's what we're afraid of. Really though, we shouldn't fear choice. All those other countries have it. If it hasn't hurt public education there, why should it hurt us here?

"Let me sum up by saying that there is enough money, if we only use it differently. The scandal of financial inequity can and must be ended. The even greater scandal of inner city education can and must be ended.

Give us the tools and give us the strategy and our people will do the job. If we have the courage and the will to change ourselves, then the Dream shall live on.

"Good night, Good-bye, and Godspeed in this great American journey."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William J. Moloney is the Superintendent of the Easton Area School District. He has been active as a speaker, consultant, newspaper columnist, contributor to professional journals, and adjunct faculty at Lehigh University. At present, Dr. Moloney serves on the Board of Governors of the Pennsylvania State Superintendents Association; the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools; the Board of Directors of the Lehigh Valley 2000 Business/Education Partnership; and the Advisory Committee of the Center for Workforce Preparation and Quality Education in Washington, D.C. Moloney holds bachelor and master degrees in history and political science as well as a doctorate in educational management earned at Harvard University. He also has done graduate work at Oxford and the University of London.